

**Washington, DC** - U.S. Reps Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Nita Lowey (D-NY) introduced legislation today calling on the Government of Bangladesh to drop sedition charges pending against Bangladeshi journalist Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury. The resolution coincides with the beginning of Mr. Choudhury's sedition trial. Choudhury faces prosecution for his advocacy for interfaith dialogue between Jews and Muslims and articles he published critical of Islamic extremism. Under Bangladeshi law, sedition is a crime punishable by death.

Choudhury is a journalist in Bangladesh known for his views on expanding dialogue between Muslims and Jews, developing ties with Israel, and criticizing the rise of Islamist parties in Bangladesh. Choudhury was detained in November 2003 at Zia International Airport in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on his way to board a flight bound for Tel Aviv, Israel, to participate in the annual Hebrew Writers Conference. Mr. Choudhury's passport was seized. On that same day, police raided his home and newspaper, seizing files, and computers..

Since Bangladeshi law prohibits travel to Israel, Mr. Choudhury was first cited for a minor passport violation. Subsequently he was charged with sedition, accused of espionage as an Israeli spy and incarcerated for 17 months.

Choudhury's prospects seemed bleak until his friend and Mount Prospect, Illinois, native, Dr. Richard Benkin, brought the case to the attention of Congressman Kirk. Kirk met with Bangladeshi Ambassador to the United States, Shamsheer Chowdhury, and wrote to

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Bangladeshi Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. Mr. Choudhury was released on bail in April 2005.

Despite pledges from senior Bangladeshi government officials that legal action against Choudhury would be dropped, the government pressed forward on its prosecution of Choudhury for sedition. Choudhury's newspaper offices were bombed by Islamic extremists in July and he was attacked by a mob in his office on October 5. A judge with alleged ties to an Islamic extremist group ruled that Mr. Choudhury must stand trial for sedition. His first court date was yesterday, November 13th.

Congressman Kirk emphasized that now is not the time to muzzle moderate sentiments in Islamic states, "The Bangladeshi Government must cease its persecution of Shoaib Choudhury. For his message of moderation and interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Jews, he is facing unjust criminal charges in an effort to silence him. The United States Congress must send a clear message: we cannot allow an outspoken advocate for religious freedom to be silenced," Kirk said today.

Rep. Nita Lowey said, "Mr. Choudhury is an invaluable voice of cooperation and moderation in a world where extremism and prejudice often dictate the course of events. We must do everything we can to ensure that Mr. Choudhury's voice continues to be heard, and that this baseless campaign to punish him is abandoned."

Richard Foltin of the American Jewish Committee has been working with Reps Kirk and Lowey on securing Mr. Choudhury's freedom. "The American Jewish Committee commends Representatives Kirk and Lowey for their introduction of a resolution calling upon the Bangladesh Government to close the sedition case against Mr. Choudhury, investigate and hold accountable those who have physically attacked him, and take steps to protect him," Foltin said. "In May 2006, AJC presented Mr. Choudhury with its Moral Courage Award recognizing his efforts to promote dialogue between Muslims and Jews and his courage to speak the truth against Islamic extremism. It is a scandal that Mr. Choudhury is being prosecuted for these very efforts to build greater interfaith understanding. We urge the House of Representatives to act quickly to pass this resolution."

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